



**AMBASSADOR LEWIS A. LUKENS
REMARKS
REGIONAL AIR CHIEFS CONFERENCE
TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2012**

(As prepared)

General Breedlove, Commander of the United States Air Forces Europe,

Brigadier General Pereira, Commander of the Senegalese Air Force and our host for this event,

Regional Air Chiefs,

General Officers and Officers here assembled,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today on behalf of the United States Mission to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. I speak for an amazing team of men and women; Americans, Senegalese, and third-country nationals that understand and appreciate what each of you are contributing to the region's security efforts.

Today we formally open this 2012 West African Regional Air Chiefs Conference; a collaboration between partner nations, United States Air Forces Africa, and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies. The idea for today's conference originated at the April 2011 Africa Air Chiefs Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At that conference, participants said that communication, pooled resources, and strong partnerships between air forces in the region would be the key to solving Africa's air safety and security challenges.

The Trans-Sahel region faces numerous and complex challenges. Recent events illustrate this better than we would like to admit. Narco-trafficking in the region has increased since March, and Northern Mali is in the throes of a rebellion influenced by foreign

extremists, exposing the Malian people to increased threats, not only to their safety, but also to food security.

Terrorists and criminals do not respect borders and operate more effectively when borders are porous and cooperation between neighboring countries is poorly coordinated. Strong regional partnerships are crucial if we are to face these challenges; increase maritime and border security capacity; counter human trafficking; and bolster regional peace support operations capabilities.

How can we achieve these goals?

By working together to devise cooperative solutions.

In fact, we've already tried this out here in Senegal. In June and July, as part of the African Maritime Law Enforcement Program, the U.S. partnered with Senegal and the Gambia, using information provided by Senegalese and U.S. aircraft; to direct Gambian, U.S., and Senegalese vessels as they pursued and boarded suspect ships in both Gambian and Senegalese waters.

That's the kind of information-sharing that will yield results and lead to a more stable continent.

There is no reason that in the future information from a Senegalese aircraft couldn't be used to support Senegal, the Gambia, Cape Verde, and Mauritania as they pursue an illegal fishing boat or fleeing narco-traffickers into each other's waters.

There's no reason that information from a Guinean aircraft couldn't be used to stop illicit trafficking across the borders of Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast.

As you work together this week, I know that you are going to find new and innovative ways to support one another's efforts.

I know that you, just like me and my colleagues, are committed to building regional capacity; learning to work together through trust and cooperation. Together we can play our part to ensure this region's prosperity and security. Together we can create a region where all citizens can live in peace.

As you pursue these lofty goals, we will be there, side-by-side and shoulder-to-shoulder.

Thanking for being our trusted partners.